



Apr 5

The Tweet Heard 'Round The World

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The Election Supervisory Board (ESB) greatly erred in its decision to impose a moratorium on the Guneez-Hannah campaign due to the official campaign's liking of a tweet that was alleged to be anti-white, anti-male, and anti-Greek life. The ESB ruled that the tweet in question qualified as deceptive campaigning. The 2018 Student Government Election Code, in section 4.12, states:

"Candidates shall refrain from knowingly deceptive campaign activities, including any act or statement reasonably calculated to injure or compromise the rights or interests of any student, faculty member, or administrator."

According to the ESB decision, the viewpoints present in campaign-affiliated social media posts did not align with the campaign's promise of inclusion on campus. The Guneez-Hannah campaign coined the phrase "A New Texas Looks like This" as a way to promote their inclusion-driven ideology.

For one, the tweet wasn't knowingly deceptive. In the mind of whoever was running the Twitter account — most likely not Guneez or Hannah themselves — ridding UT Student Government of its heavy white and Greek life presence aligned with the campaign's overall message of diversity and inclusion.

But instead of delving into that obvious oversight on the part of the ESB, I will discuss the implications of

The tweet that caused the Guneez-Hannah campaign so much strife reads as follows:

“hey kids vote @GuneezHannah for UT pres and vp! these two genuine WoC have a mission to cater to marginalized and tokenized voices and we’re tired of straight white Zionist men in power !!!!”

It is important to note that the above tweet was not tweeted by the Guneez-Hannah campaign account, nor was it tweeted by either of the two candidates themselves from their personal accounts. While tweets from Hannah McMorris’ own Twitter account caused an immense amount of controversy during the election, I will only be commenting on the above tweet as it most pertains to my argument on social media usage in campaigns.

Many UT students were outraged by the fact that the official campaign account of the Guneez-Hannah campaign “favorited” this tweet as, in the minds of these students, favoriting is equivalent to endorsement. However, this comparison is incorrect.

After all, what if the manager of the campaign account favorited it simply because the tweet had the phrase “hey kids vote @GuneezHannah for UT pres and vp!” It’s possible that the person favoriting the tweet agreed with that statement only, but still decided to favorite the tweet anyway. Believing that the favoriting implies agreement with the entire tweet is dubious.

I understand why so much of this Student Government election’s campaigning relied on social media usage. We’re college students. If we’re not in class — and sometimes even when we’re in class — we’re on our phones.

Yet, sometimes social media hurts far more than it helps.

The above tweet was not the only social media fiasco that occurred during the election. Guneez Ibrahim herself, not her campaign, received another moratorium on the last day of the election for retweeting a tweet in solidarity with her campaign over spring break. Campaigning over spring break was banned by the ESB. The presidential candidate on the opposing ticket, Colton Becker, received a moratorium for “love-reacting” to a Facebook post written by Jewish students opposing the anti-Semitism believed to be perpetuated by the Guneez-Hannah ticket.

Of course, there are certainly merits to the argument that the ESB decisions were suppression of the candidates’ free speech rights. But outside the First Amendment, the social media actions of both tickets is simply bad campaigning.

Personally, I'm curious to see if the events of this unusually divisive and draining election will result in a change of policy in the Student Government Election Code. I'm not sure that an actual policy change is needed as much as a lesson on proper social media campaign activity.

Effective social media usage is likely one of the factors that contributed to the Colton-Mehraz ticket's eventual landslide victory. However, using social media clearly did not come without strife. For the sake of the entire UT student body, I urge UT students to read the candidates' platforms or speak directly with the candidates themselves, rather than scrolling through retweets and favorites and basing their decision on those. Platform points and conversation reveal far more than favorites ever could.

Though, candidates themselves are not free from responsibility. Perhaps the most obvious national example is President Donald Trump. To his credit, the president has been a very active user of social media and it likely helped him win the presidency in 2016. However, his incendiary tweets have proven to be increasingly problematic each day into his presidency.

He may believe that his tweets may be presenting him as a strong leader to the rest of the world, but what they serve as is an invitation for his critics to criticize him even further. He is literally giving Democrats and other opponents leverage that they don't even have to dig to find.

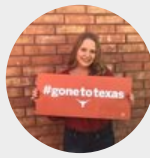
Every action in a campaign is designed to increase a candidate's showing in the polls, and for good reason. With as much thought as candidates put into designing their own platforms and coining catchy phrases as a form of branding, I'm surprised that not as much thought was put into social media campaigning. This goes for both executive alliance tickets.

Hopefully this election serves an example of what not to do.

Campus

student government, social media





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